This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

041109Z Apr 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000507

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2010

TAGS: PGOV PREL NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PICK ME FOR PRESIDENT, OK HOW ABOUT VICE

PRESIDENT?

REF: ABUJA 458

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne per 1.4 b and d

11. (C) Summary: Governors Odili and Alamieyeseigha representing Rivers and Bayelsa states respectively, harbor unrealistic presidential aspirations, but are contenders for the Vice Presidential slot. Though President Obasanjo has cooled somewhat towards Odili following the governor's failure to keep violence under control, Odili is still a strong presidential ally in the South-South. Alamieyeseigha, the sole Ijaw governor in Nigeria, has been criss-crossing the country in a bid to increase his national recognition and credibility. Presidential candidates Atiku Abubabakar (Atiku) and Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) are courting Alamieyeseigha as a running mate and IBB is also talking to Odili. Neither Odili nor Alamieyeseigha enjoy national support and Odili would be hard-pressed to carry even his own state, were there fair and transparent elections. However, with their large bankrolls from corruption, both governors fit nicely into Nigeria's "selection" paradigm and are political actors to watch in the run-up to 2007. End Summary.

South-South Dreams of President, but VP Slot More Likely

- 12. (C) In a recent meeting, Rivers State Governor Odili stressed the South-South was not bound by the "gentlemen's agreement" zoning the presidency to the North in 2007 (reftel). Odili declared the south-south "deserves" the presidency and there is no signed piece of paper ceding the top leadership spot to the North. He added that PDP Chair of the Board of Trustees Tony Anenih did not have the "right" to decide the presidency would go to the North. Odili raised the familiar claim of the historical underrepresentation of the Niger Delta in senior national politics as justification for a south-south president in 2007. Their absence from national politics is particularly "galling", given the economic import of the region, Odili opined. Asked whether the VP slot in 2007 would suffice, Odili replied negatively, querying, "Why should we settle?"
- 13. (SBU) Bayelsa State government representatives echoed the refrain that the South-South would not be appeased by the VP nod. State officials proffered the same reasons Odili did and added the ethnic card -- Not only should Nigeria's next president be from the South- South, he should be Ijaw, the majority ethnic group in the Niger Delta. Bayelsa State Secretary General Steve Azaiki told us Alamieyeseigha was on

SIPDIS

a campaign to build national credibility. Azaiki drew our attention to Alamieyeseigha's "turbaning" — the granting of an honorific title — in VP Atiku's northern stronghold, Katsina. (Note: While Atiku is from Adamawa, he considers Katsina part of his base because Katsina was the home of the late General Shehu Yar Adua from whom Atiku inherited the leadership of the PDM faction within the PDP.) Alamieyeseigha has also made several recent public speeches, emphasizing the need for "true federalism." Finally the governor continues to advance infrastructure projects in Bayelsa. This showed, Azaiki boasted, the governor was "serious" about 2007.

Comment: On March 12, Alamieyeseigha and Governor Orji Kalu of Abia state received titles from the Emir of Katsina at a ceremony attended by the Vice President and the governors of Adamawa, Katsina and Delta states. The two governors became only the second and third southerners to be turbaned; the first was the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola. It is very likely that this northern exposure did not come free of charge to presidential wanna-be's Alamieyeseigha and Kalu. Alamieyeseigha has publicly acknowledged donating computers to the Islamic University in Katsina. We suspect that many more "gifts" were proffered. End Comment.

Possible Match-Ups: IBB -Alamieyeseigha, IBB- Odili, Atiku- Alamieyeseigha

 $\P4.$ (C) Political insider Professor Ukande Damachi told us IBB was looking at Alamieyeseigha as running mate. IBB is also winking at Odili. He likes both governors because they have

large coffers with which to fund a national campaign. Odili has the added attraction of being Obasanjo's man. IBB might be calculating that having Odili at his side could make Obasanjo less jittery about Babangida's efforts. On the other hand, Alamieyeseigha is not in Obasanjo's good graces. He is perceived as an Atiku man; however in the past several months he has been somewhat less visible and vocal in support of the Vice President.

15. (C) Atiku is "talking with" Alamieyeseigha according to Bayelsa state officials. Despite believing the time is nigh for an Ijaw president, the governor's chief political adviser told us the vice presidency would be a "fine start" for the Niger Delta peoples. In short, Alamieyeseigha may be shooting for the top job in hopes of landing the second slot.

Home Support Weak for Odili, Somewhat Stronger for Alamieyseigha

- 16. (C) Governor Odili enjoys very little support in Rivers (reftel). He is referred to derisively as "Governor Donate-Us" for his penchant of donating lavishly to pet projects. A rabid soccer fan, Odili has donated new cars, millions of Niara, and even plots of land to high-performing soccer players. Rivers State residents complain bitterly that the governor's "philanthropy" is at odds with the state's poor infrastructure, inadequate social services, and high unemployment. Though the governor is widely believed among Nigeria's most corrupt public officials, his closeness with the President leads most to consider him "untouchable."
- 17. (C) Odili continues to face mini-eruptions from militant Ijaw leader Dokobu Asari and other politicized gangs. This week, for example, Asari and his boys staged a small protest in Port Harcourt. Sources tell us Odili has failed to implement fully the gun buy-back agreement brokered between Asari and Obasanjo last fall. Under the terms of the agreement, the government was to pay an average of Naira 200,000 (\$1,500) per weapon a sum roundly criticized by independent observers for being so generous as to encourage future armed criminality. However it seem that Odili has not paid in full. Making matters worse, it appears Asari did not share the revenues he did receive from the buy-back program.
- 18. (C) By contrast, Alamieyeseigha enjoys some measure of popular support. Bayelsa is an almost ethnically homogenous Ijaw state. State residents support Alamieyeseigha because they see him as the premier Ijaw elected political figure in Nigeria. In addition, Alamieyeseigha has successfully implemented some infrastructure projects though nothing commensurate with the scale of oil revenues his state recoups from the federal government. Alamieyeseigha too ranks in the top-tier of reportedly corrupt public officials, according to many observers.

Comment

- -----
- 19. (C) The three main presidential contenders (Obasanjo, Atiku and IBB) have promised positions to virtually every governor in their efforts to secure support for their 2007 ambitions. While Odili and Alamieyeseigha are prominent politicians from the increasingly important South-South region, neither would garner much national support in a fair, transparent, intimidation-free, electoral process. Both governors are viewed as corrupt. Though there was political thuggery throughout the country in the 2003 elections, the violence and intimidation in Rivers State was particularly bad. That said, the money hoarded from corruption will stand Odili and Alamieyeseigha well if the presidential/vice presidential campaign takes place under the Nigerian "selection" paradigm.
- $\underline{\mathbb{1}}$ 10. (U) This cable has been cleared by Embassy Abuja. BROWNE